

[Albert Williams]

Belief and Customs - Folkstuff Copy - 1 FOLKLORE NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE October 25, 1938

SUBJECT STORIES OUT OF LOCAL LIFE - Albert Williams - (River and Creek Shore Life of New York City)

1. Date and time of interview

October 21 and October 24, 1938.

2. Place of interview

West Farms Creek (one block off 177th St. Station IRT along West Farms Road)

3. Name and address of informant

Albert Williams

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

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Walters (another informant along West Farms Creek, at Whitlock and Westchester Ave)

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

X

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

A small shanty on the shore partitioned off into two rooms. One room contains a pot-bellied stove. Other room a bed. Very poorly furnished, just a few household utensils showing. The shanty stands on a lot which is used by an auto-wrecking establishment. Nearby is a framehouse and a wire-lined chicken-coop. The shanty is directly opposite the abandoned Starlight Park Resort (see Librere story).

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE October 21, 24, 1938.

SUBJECT STORIES OUT OF LOCAL LIFE — Albert Williams

1. Ancestry Scotch-Irish-American

2. Place and date of birth New York City, 1893.

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3. Family None

4. Places lived in, with dates Refused to discuss

5. Education, with dates Grammar School

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Carpenter, mechanic, does nothing now.

7. Special skills and interests None

8. Community- and religious activities None

9. Description of informant - Informant is above medium height, gray-black hair; most interesting physical characteristic is mouth which is slightly out of control; a dead giveaway of fear, embarrassment and general anti-social character. He was not unfriendly, but more or less noncommittal, except where conversation touched on hurricane. He is a war-veteran (there was an army overcoat hanging on a line outside shack). He would not discuss the war. Looked shell-shocked or perhaps a socially-created attitude - 'Functionally unemployable' - all this a guess. After a while showed an increased interest in discussion. When interviewer suggested possibility of picking up a battery radio set for him, he sizzled a little and then subsided.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE October 21 and 24, 1938

SUBJECT STORIES OUT OF LOCAL LIFE - ALBERT WILLIAMS (River and Creek Shore Life of New York City)

How far did the water come up? It came right up through everything. Right out to the lot. To the street. It even got some of those chickens down in the lower part there. How I felt — like something was playing around with me. The water started to go up a little just like the tide always does coming in. It was raining all day that time and the day before. This place leaks. It was raining all the time. We (indicating companions about whom he said nothing, two old men sipping at coffee) had to pull the bed to the middle of the room. That was just the rain, that's all. What did we do — we played cards. Did I ever live in the City. Yes, I lived in the City, I knew a crowd. I don't like noise. Well, it bothers me, that's all. That's all there is to it. No, I don't go downtown. I know this is just a creek but the Atlantic didn't bother me any, we were all together it was a big boat it was crowded. I never thought of being scared of the ocean. Because I was young? Yeah, maybe. I wasn't scared of the ocean. I wasn't on the ocean I was on a boat and it was dry all the way over but this place is damp almost all the time. Maybe I will go to a hospital. This German lady (pointing to nearby barge) she came over and tol' me about a hurricane. Sure I heard of a hurricane. Then Mr. Santo (from the Street-Cleaning Dept. depot down the block) he tol' me about hurricane too. I didn't do [?] nothin' because I didn't know what to do. It seemed just like an extra high tide. It just kept going up it got up to the window and it came in. It ran right 2 out on the lot. I should've done something about those chickens maybe. It kept going up and up. That's the way the world's going to end. How do I know? Water that'll be the end.

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It'll just keep going up and up. They can't stop water going up all the time. It just keeps coming. I don't know if I believe in God, no. Those chickens kept screeching their heads off it gave me the willies. I had stuff hanging out for three days. About the world going to end? You don' want to know about that you're a young feller. They can do anything see but they can't do anything about the water coming up. Now that's all I know. Would I care? I don' know. Do I get lonely here? No. That water makes a noise all night long I'm right up to the water it raps around. At first I couldn't sleep so well sometimes I don't sleep so well now. I smoke a lot too. If I could get a radio it would sure be nice. I'd listen to everything sure all day long but I'd keep it low. After a while I'd fall asleep. Then I'd put it on again, see? Yeah, that's an army coat. Yeah, I did hear about the vets down in Florida that was a hurricane too. It played around here on the creek but it never got rough. It just kept getting higher and higher. It ran up on the lot. Right out to the street. Everybody talked about it but that's all I saw. It did what? It ripped up houses? Carried them through the air? I bet it could do more than that I'll bet it could carry off the Empire State Building. That would be some wind. But it wouldn't be the mind it'd be the water that would do it.

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FORM D Extra Comment

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 HAMILTON TERRACE

DATE Oct. 21, 24.

SUBJECT STORIES OUT OF LOCAL LIFE — ALBERT WILLIAMS

At Eastchester Bay and West Farms Creek, on basis of interviews with half a dozen residents, some casual, three interviews of some length, there are some tentative conclusions to be made. One group of residents consists of people who have a definite and wholesome pattern of living around the shore. They own boathouses, work winters in the city, like to fish, and otherwise can draw up for interviewer a kind of social pattern. Another group consists of those who have been driven out of the City in the last seven years — they find it economical to live on abandoned barges along the shores and they seek odd jobs and are interested in getting back to the City, to apartment living. Another group would be those who have been driven into an anti-social form of existence, without means or hope of employment. These groups tend to overlap i.e., people who have been driven toward the shore for economic reasons sometimes tend to make a complete living scheme out of it and on the other hand, some of them also exhibit an increasing inertia, a slowing-down. Perhaps these groupings do not tell the story of shore living; they are offered at this point. Baychester (Eastchester Bay) with its boathouses, frame houses near the shore, is an example of the first group, (see Walters and Nelson stories). The harbor Police headquarters at the Battery have told interviewer that there is a large colony of residents along the creek which runs out of Jamaica Bay. It is called the Raunt. Interviewer has seen the 2 Raunt several times which gives a very complete picture — houses on stilts, and rowboats being worked lazily through the Creek waters — women talking to each other from house window to house window across a dozen feet of water — boys in home-made bathing suits diving off home-made piers. For examples of Group 2, see Schaefer and Librere stories. Group 3 is an obvious kind of social group — the tramp, the hobo, the lumpen in a river setting. In present interview, informant cones near fitting into Group 3.
